

Listening for Tradition: Contributing to a Regional Musical Identity through Higher Education Research

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1. Introduction

Born in the south west of Ireland, my engagement with Irish traditional music was developed at an early age through my local community. My sense of place was reinforced by the narratives of that community, where I became involved with Siamsa Tíre, the National Folk Theatre of Ireland, whose focus is at a regional level (Foley, 2013; Kearney, 2013b, 2013c), and Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann,¹ an organisation for the promotion

¹ Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) is the largest body involved in the promotion of Irish traditional music. It operates a network of local branches in Ireland and internationally and has a number of regional centres, one of which is located in Dundalk.

of Irish culture, most active in the field of music and which operates through a network of local branches (see Henry, 1989; Fleming, 2004; Kearney, 2013a). I moved to the southern city of Cork to attend university and became part of the music community there. When I finished my undergraduate studies in geography, I returned to music, seeking to understand the geographies of the music that I enjoyed learning and performing. My academic studies gave me new perspectives on my own culture, my music and the places where I live and work. Undertaking teaching roles as both a lecturer and instrument tutor further increased my engagement with concepts and the wider community of musical practice. In the paper I acknowledge music and space/place as co-constitutive and the process of identity formation for both the region and the academic institution is intertwined (see Leyshon, Matless and Revill, 1998).

The geographical importance of music lies in its role in reflecting and shaping geographical processes and, simultaneously, the role of geographical processes in shaping the music that is produced. As places seek to promote their own local identities and compete with other places for funding, tourism and jobs, music and a broader cultural self-awareness is integral to a positive representation of place. Noting the significance of music

with clear geographical implications, John Lovering states: 'Music is not just a hobby indulged at the end of the working day, an aspect of "entertainment consumption" or even a personal door to the sublime – although it can be all of these things. It is often also a profound influence on the way we see our world(s) and situate ourselves in relation to others' (1998: 32). By developing a focus on local and regional musical repertoires, narratives and traditions, academic modules and concerts organised by an academic institution can challenge and shape perceptions of Irish traditional music.

The field of ethnomusicology has evolved to focus on process over product, as 'interest shifted from pieces of music to processes of musical creation and performance – composition and improvisation – and the focus shifted from collection of repertory to examination of these processes' (Myers, 1993: 8). Education and transmission are also important processes in the development of music cultures. Academic institutions are an integral part of these processes but these processes also lead to products in the form of new collections, publications, audio recordings and performances or the reinforcement of musical canon through pedagogical practice. As musician and scholar Jack Talty notes, 'Since canonicity is frequently constructed (and occasionally challenged) through pedagogy, faculty should be

conscious of their influence' (2017: 104). Thus, this paper is largely self-reflective, focusing on one cultural region and an Irish academic institution that engages with the study and performance of Irish traditional music but I am cognisant of developing pedagogies and philosophies in higher education elsewhere in Ireland and internationally (see Hill, 2009a, 2009b; Talty, 2017). This paper is further informed by local newspaper coverage of musical events, classroom feedback and engagement with the local community, notably an ongoing study focused on the Oriel Traditional Orchestra, an ensemble-in-residence established at DkIT. These sources help balance the weight of my positionality within the institution.

2. Location

Co. Louth is located on the east coast of Ireland with the town of Dundalk located approximately halfway between the major cities of Dublin and Belfast. The 'Oriel region' comprises parts of Co. Louth and surrounding counties Meath, Monaghan, Armagh and Down and is based upon the ancient kingdom of Orialla or Airialla. The concept of Oriel as a musical region is presented in Pádraigín Ní Uallacháin's seminal study, *A Hidden Ulster* (2003), which places particular emphasis on the language and song traditions of the region. The location of the Irish border through this region from 1922 has implications for the imagination and

performance of cultural identity but a number of cultural projects have also benefitted from cross-border and peace funding since the 1990s in particular. DkIT is located approximately 10km from the border and has engaged in a number of cross-border and local cultural initiatives.

Programmes of study in the arts and humanities seek to educate students to think critically and challenge orthodoxies and it is important to look beyond a narrow canon of sources and examples, such as the narrative that locates Irish traditional music and exemplary performers in the tradition on the west coast of Ireland. Despite a rich local musical tradition, the Oriel region does not feature significantly in the narratives of Irish traditional music in the twentieth century and does not form part of a canon for the study of Irish traditional music. Its location on the east coast, impact of English conquest and the development of major urban centres contrasts greatly with the rural, seemingly untouched west of Ireland. Research and discourse demonstrates an emphasis in Irish traditional music studies on counties along the west coast of Ireland (O'Shea, 2008; Ó hAllmhuráin, 2016), influenced by the development of a 'myth of the west' and issues of music and identity in Northern Ireland (Vallely, 2008) and a romantic nationalist focus on western places but also recognisable in other studies relating to competitions and the activities of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (Kearney, 2013a). Flute

player and academic Niall Keegan asserts: “In traditional music today there are discourses and vocabularies that are privileged above others [...] Such terminologies are built around issues of regional style and past, privileged practice” (2012: 40). Critically responding to these narratives of tradition with references to music and musical figures beyond the canon is an important aspect of academic study.

The location of an academic institution in the Oriel region with a relatively recent engagement in the study of music (music established in 2003) adds further relevance to engaging with local musical traditions and challenging established canons. However, it is important not to seek to create new canons through the rejection of established knowledge. Furthermore, faculty and students bring their learning into and engage with the communities of musical practice outside of the institution. The relationship between these two communities is part of the development of regional musical practice and each can inform and influence the other.

3. Irish Traditional Music in Academic Spaces

Academic institutions have a role in changing and shaping local musical processes, through interaction with students who travel from and study at a distance from the institution’s location, and through engagement with their local communities. These local

communities can and do become the subject of research. Within Irish traditional music, Talty has noted that ‘in Ireland, for instance, young practitioner-researchers are engaging “ethnomusicology at home” at an unprecedented rate. Their research projects explore cultural and musical aspects of Irish traditional repertoire in great detail and in the process diversify students’ understanding of it within and beyond academic institutions’ (2017: 105). Moves towards applied ethnomusicology include facilitating workshops for and sharing research outputs with schools and community groups, leading to the reintroduction of forgotten repertoires and enhancement of local festivals (see Nettl, 2005; Pettan and Titon, 2015). In this paper I critically examine these processes from my own experience in Co. Louth and the surrounding Oriel cultural region.

The Irish traditional music community has conventionally existed outside of academia but through the twentieth century gained a greater presence at Irish institutions. This is not unproblematic. As Talty notes, ‘traditional musics are communal, extra-institutional forms of expression associated with unique processes of transmission, enculturation, and social interaction’ raising questions as to how these cultural processes are represented in higher education and ‘what aspects of community music making do traditional music curricula hope to impart to

their students' (2017: 102). Talty challenges academics to consider their role not only in the transmission of knowledge but as factors in the evolution of a musical community. As members of the Irish traditional music community increasingly engage in academic studies and as academic institutions increasingly include the study of folk music traditions in their curricula, the role of the institutions in shaping the geography of Irish traditional music becomes more apparent. Nevertheless, an academic institution is only one factor in the development of music and regional identities and its role in a musical ecosystem should not be overplayed.

Academic institutions are spaces in which social relations are both constructed and analysed but as they draw upon international literature and research and teach students from a wide geographical area they facilitate the opening up of their regions intellectually, creatively and geographically. Academic institutions can assert a local identity and highlight their role within their region – 'Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) has earned a reputation as the leading higher education provider in the North East of Ireland [...] we have contributed to the transformation of our region' (www.dkit.ie) – while simultaneously promoting a strategy of internationalisation. The music of the Institute's community reflects this Janus-like vision but this does not necessitate a fixed musical sound or style.

The study of traditional music is a core component of both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at DkIT and is an integral area of research in the Creative Arts Research Centre. Students engage with the cultural, social and historical study of traditional musics while also developing their performance skills. Central to the performance of traditional music at DkIT is the *Ceol Oirghialla* Traditional Music Ensemble. The Ensemble enriches the cultural life of the Institute and the region, performing at a number of events throughout the year. As well as concerts on campus that attract audiences including musicians from the wider community, staff and students also engage in teaching and session playing in the town of Dundalk and further afield. While the students can be drawn from a wide area, including international students, the concerts often draw on local themes and repertoire, helping to develop a sense of regional identity and make connections between the Institute community and the surrounding region. Academic activities provide validation and affirmation for local musical activities while the MacAnna Theatre and Fr McNally Recital Room at DkIT provide formal performance spaces that can be shared by various communities. Drawing attention to important musical figures in a region, sharing knowledge that may have been forgotten and organising successful musical events such as concerts or through teaching in the community, connects academic research with the

community. Challenging historical canons in the narratives and study of Irish traditional music affects how people view and hear their world and can reinforce, promote or develop a sense of regional identity amongst a community of musical practice beyond the academy.

Keegan (2012) highlights a focus on solo performers in the tradition but also acknowledges a growing relevance in ensemble performance. Academic institutions provide a space in which musicians come together and explore their practice in groups, often with credits assigned to ensemble playing. As tradition is a process, new sounds can evolve and develop that shape regional music identities but as institutions attract new students each year, the sounds produced by these musicians can constantly change. There is a desire to connect with, explore, understand and interpret the music of the past in a manner that is relevant and aesthetically pleasing in the present, while understanding the processes of interpretation and traditional aesthetics. There is an inherent challenge for both the academic community and the nearby music communities. Echoing Joshua Dickson of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, there is a desire for 'greater emphasis on creativity in all facets of coursework' (Talty, 2017: 110) but Keegan asserts that 'contemporary practices seen as 'new' in the context of the Irish tradition and that have an obviously syncretic source are rejected as being aesthetically invalid' (2012: 213).

However, Talty concludes, 'Fostering critical engagement and creativity in the curriculum helps prevent the perpetuation of unchallenged narratives about tradition and authenticity' (2017: 112). Thus it is important to critically engage with the processes through which contemporary artists construct and reconstruct regional identities in Irish traditional music that, in many instances, move beyond older stylistic approaches, spaces and contexts, and repertoire to engage in new forms of presentation with newly composed repertoire and in new spaces or through new media. Critical engagement in creativity can also foster a sense of regional relevance and identity.

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4. Understanding Regions

Presenting at an early academic conference focused on the concept of regional styles in Irish traditional music, Co. Louth singer and collector Seán Corcoran stated:

[...] concepts of place and region have long had a powerful role in the history of Irish thought. These concepts have been largely ideological constructs with little correlation with cultural distribution patterns, and have been widely accepted in fields of folk-music and folklore studies, where they are linked with various related concepts, like “remoteness” and “authenticity”

(1997: 25).

Despite the perceived acceptance of ‘place’ and ‘region’ in Irish traditional music, the discourse on regional styles is quite recent and in some instances attempts to force the identification of regions with particular aspects of musical style that can be overly romanticised or easily problematized. Seán Ó Riada is an important figure in this context, particularly through his radio series *Our Musical Heritage*, first broadcast in 1962, but his influence on the study and performance of Irish traditional music

extends far beyond that. Ó Riada (1982) focuses on a small number of regions that did not include the Oriel region, which began an examination and discussion of stylistic differences in Irish traditional music based on a regional model that was already being eroded by changes in technology and society during the 1960s. Nevertheless, the doomsayers who predicted the extinction of regional styles and the homogenisation of Irish traditional music (Ó Riada, 1982; Ó Bróithe, 1999) have been challenged by a desire amongst practitioners and listeners to engage with diversity in the tradition (Dowling, 1999), some of which remains connected at some level with a sense of place and motivated in part by a desire to commercialise regional identities in Irish traditional music within the tourism, recording and entertainment industries (Vallely, 1997, Kneafsey, 2003; Laffey, 2007). The contemporary relevance of regional identities in Irish traditional music today relates to both the continuing importance of local Irish traditional music activity and the influence of marketing and commercialism on regional styles and identities in Irish traditional music (O'Shea, 2008; Ó hAllmhuráin, 2016).

The initial focus of my own postgraduate studies focused on the concept of musical style but as my understanding developed, I became more interested in the importance of regional identities expressed in relation to music and the networks, infrastructure

and ecosystems that exist in which musical culture is shaped and supported and nurtured. As Gergory Dorchak writes in relation to Cape Breton fiddle traditions, 'to think of cultural practices only via stylistic terms can hamper the ability of a tradition to adapt to the inevitable changes that occur within a community' (2008: 153). Thus, this paper is not about musical style, although regional musical styles are a component of what I am discussing. More than this, I am referring to what Corcoran terms 'tribalism' (1997), cognisant of the problems presented by him in relation to the processes that shaped a regional understanding of Irish traditional music. The sound of music is not abandoned as we listen to the sounds that are produced but these are contextualised by a geographical narrative that considers the wider social and cultural contexts and relationship with local traditions.

As I have stated elsewhere, 'local contexts remain important for the transmission, performance and consumption of Irish traditional music' but 'local distinctiveness is challenged by changing social and economic conditions, technology and the distances that many musicians travel to take part in musical events' (Kearney, 2013a). Whereas early attempts to identify regions in Irish traditional music focused on aspects of musical style, Sally Sommers-Smith states that 'regional styles, and

indeed dance music in its entirety, are no longer geographically bound' (2001: 115). Yet it is not unusual to meet a musician who emphasises their connections to a place, read a review that interprets a recording in the context of a regional style, or supervise an academic project that seeks to highlight the musical heritage of a particular region. Thus a new understanding of regions is required. As geographer and musician Deborah Thompson notes in a study of Appalachian musical traditions:

Like the rest of space, regions are now conceived as multiple, shifting, and contingent, with porous boundaries if they are "bounded" at all. The processual, historically contingent nature of a region and its entanglement with various networks of social relations makes it hard to characterize or describe, as it is constantly changing and evolving, with different parts changing at different rates and continually forming new webs of connection

(2006: 67).

Irish traditional music has become a globally performed art form with many participants engaging with it who have no hereditary links with the country, provoking questions about the connections between music and place and concepts of authenticity (see also Keegan, 2011: 40). Place and tradition must be understood as processes and, to this end, Mats Meelin cites Spalding and Woodside's definition of tradition as a constant 'work in progress' (Spalding and Woodside, 1995: 249), remarking on the internal and external forces that shape a dance tradition and the 'paradoxical concept of continuity and change

in tradition and issues of selectivity, creativity and ongoing reconstruction within tradition' (Meelin, 2012: 132). Regional identities, though often based on the construction of historical *raison d'être* or foundation myth, are also a process that can be revised and reshaped and resounded. As Ó hAllmhuráin has noted, the music of regions has changed as it has moved into new spaces such as the pub and more recently become part of the tourism industry (2016: 228). The development of academic communities engaged in the research and performance of Irish traditional music involving selectivity, creativity and ongoing reconstruction have also created new spaces and soundscapes that are part of the evolution of regional identities in the tradition. While the community of musical practice may itself be divided, sometimes by oversimplified binaries of 'tradition' and 'innovation', the academic institution becomes a space for research, dialogue and experimentation (see Hill, 2009b). The institution can instigate change but is more likely to reflect changes, attitudes and practices in the wider traditional music communities. Reflective practice and increasing global interaction amongst academics brings new perspectives on and to the local.

Understanding changing contexts for the transmission, performance and commercialisation of Irish traditional music is

integral to the academic study of Irish traditional music. A central focus of this is the globalisation of Irish traditional music, which can be examined through historical phenomena (Motherway, 2013) but is particularly prominent in the 1990s. Even after the significant influence of *Riverdance* (1994) on the commercial market for Irish traditional music, Seán Laffey, editor of *Irish Music Magazine* stated: 'Riverdance was a phenomena that raised many boats on the tide of its popular commercial success, and yet running counter to its jazzy glamour has been a strong re-awakening of the local traditions, the rise of a new generation of solo and duet players re-interpreting the best of the past in a faithful and diligent fashion' (2007: 1). Laffey's statement suggests a 'revival' but, alongside a rediscovery of the past through music, there is also a process of constructing new local soundscapes within the commercial music industry. Connell and Gibson (2004) critique the association between music and place in the commercial music industry and examine the process of deterritorialization in music acknowledging that 'musicians are situated in multiple cultural and economic networks – some seeking to reinvent or revive traditions, others creating opportunities in musical production to stir national political consciousness or contribute to transnational political movements, and some merely seeking to achieve commercial success' (2004: 343). The attachment of a commercial value to

musics that are accompanied by a local or regional narrative is examined by Vallely (1997) and Keegan (2011) but these narratives do not necessitate a distinctive local sound or an adherence to older musical styles.

5. Academic Engagement – Constructing *Ceol Oirghialla*

Traditional music in Dundalk and the wider Oriel region was well-established prior to the development of music programmes at DkIT. A branch of CCÉ was first established in Dundalk in 1958 and the Dundalk-based Siamsa Céilí Band won the All-Ireland senior title three years in a row from 1967-1969. The music of the area was significantly influenced by outsiders including Sligo musician John Joe Gardiner (1892-1979), detracting from the emergence of a regional musical identity. Later artists including Gerry O'Connor (b.1958), who was a faculty member at DkIT for a time, evoked a regional identity in his recordings (Lá Lugh, 1995). This sense of regional identity was further enhanced through the publication of *A Hidden Ulster* (Ní Uallacháin, 2003). These local traditions inform the development of Irish traditional music at DkIT, which engages with local cultures alongside national and international ethnomusicologies.

Commenting on the institutionalisation of numerous oral folk and traditional musics into formal education programmes in Western-style conservatories and music academies, Juniper Hill notes: 'these programmes can have huge impacts not only on musical transmission methods, but also on aesthetics, repertoire, style, performance practices, creative opportunities, hierarchies, political manipulation, economic considerations, valuation, status, and public perception' (2009a: 207, 208). Focusing on the goals of the Sibelius Academy in Finland, she outlines aspects that are shared with DkIT: 'to resuscitate moribund traditions, to diversify the field of folk music, to increase the status and image of folk music, to produce highly skilled and knowledgeable folk musicians, and to turn folk musicians into artists and folk music into a respected art form' (2009b: 88-89). Through the inclusion of traditional music in the form of academic research and recognition, academic institutions inform, support and even advocate for traditional music in the region, engaging with local musicians, attracting musicians from outside, and facilitating rehearsals and performances.

Linking between regional and academic communities of musical practices is mutually beneficial and reciprocal. The Oriel Traditional Ensemble was established in 2017 and, as well as rehearsing in DkIT, includes members of faculty amongst its

directors and membership. The Institute is also a partner in Music Generation Louth, whose string orchestra, focusing on Western Art Music repertoire, rehearse at the Institute. Music Generation Louth have also recently partnered with CCÉ to establish a youth orchestra engaging with Irish traditional music. Researcher-practitioners at DkIT facilitated a variety of activities for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann² in 2018 that focused on the musical traditions of Louth and Oriel, and these follow a series of concerts since 2012 that present and highlight local music and musicians. Féile na Tána (est. 2015), organised by local musicians Zoe Conway and John McIntyre – who have also contributed to instrumental tuition at DkIT – has also promoted some regionally-focused musical projects. Thus, as in other music scenes, it is the emergence of several actors that underpins musical development, of which the academic institution is one and the incorporation of traditional music into academic programmes is only one aspect of the role of the institution.

Shortly after moving to Dundalk in 2011, I joined the local branch of CCÉ and began participating in local music sessions. I became more aware of the sense of tradition and, in some ways a lack thereof amongst a greater part of the community, particularly in

² Organised by Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, translated as the festival of the music of Ireland, is the largest annual festival of Irish traditional music in Ireland and has a focus on competitions.

terms of a regional identity.³ And yet a sense of regional identity is explicitly present in the work of a variety of musicians and ensembles in the region, reinforced by promotional rhetoric and reviews. The music department with whom I took up a lecturing position was referred to as *Ceol Oirghialla*, the music of the Oriel region. Building upon the work of my colleagues and predecessors, I was presented with an opportunity to ‘create a new music (sub)culture [...] through a combination of ideas with education and institutional power’ (Hill, 2009b: 86). Over the past seven years I have endeavoured to develop a focus in my teaching, particularly through the DkIT *Ceol Oirghialla* Traditional Music Ensemble, on the traditions of the region but placing these in a broader soundscape of Irish traditional music. Concerts have included *Bearna Uladh* (2017) which focused on the musical traditions around the Irish border. Other concerts, such as *Imirce an Cheoil* (2012) and *Ó Cladach go Cladach* (2015) reflected the region’s links with musicians from Sligo and the influence of Irish-American musical traditions on the development of traditional music in Ireland. Performers in all of the concerts include many students encountering Irish traditional music from a background in other musical genres and their perceptions, creativity and interpretation shape the music of these concerts.

³ My reflections as a ‘blow-in’ engaging in a local Irish traditional music scene are informed by the work of anthropologist Adam Kaul and his study of Irish traditional music in Doolin (2013).

Two aspects of academic engagement with Irish traditional music at DkIT that are considered herein are the development of historical research that informs current practice and can lead to a revival of aspects of a musical tradition (see Rosenberg, 2014) and the engagement in creative arts practice and teaching that impacts on changing musical aesthetics within the tradition. In addition to research undertaken by academics in the department, a number of undergraduate and postgraduate research dissertations have focused on local or regional issues, including creating critical editions from manuscript sources, developing biographical studies of local musical figures, and exploring performance practice and the musical styles of influential performers. Performing groups and teachers incorporate knowledge and skills from this research into their practice, including changing pedagogy and new or rediscovered repertoire, which may also be arranged for new and changing instrumentation or aesthetics. The development of larger scale ensembles or 'traditional orchestras' reflects a changing aesthetic and performance practice in the tradition (see also Keegan, 2012). The DkIT *Ceol Oirghialla* Traditional Music Ensemble draws inspiration from a variety of Irish traditional music groups, exploring possibilities of arrangement and inspiration with respect for both tradition and new tastes. The ensemble also draws upon research into the musical traditions of Louth and

Oriel by staff and postgraduates in the Institute. Concerts in recent years have celebrated famous local musical figures including fiddle players John Joe Gardiner (2012) and Josephine Keegan (2013), dancer Mona Roddy (2014) and piano accordion player Brian O’Kane (2017). These concerts have awakened an interest amongst audiences in local traditions and raised the appreciation for the individuals and musical traditions that are celebrated. The ensemble has provided a model for other initiatives including the recently established Oriel Traditional Orchestra. Some of the repertoire has been integrated into other teaching by local music teachers and by local branches of CCÉ. Students had the opportunity to meet, speak and perform with Josephine Keegan and Brian O’Kane, the central musical figures in *Ómós* (2013) and *Marching in Tradition* (2017). For *Marching in Tradition*, the music of O’Kane was transcribed from both manuscript and audio sources as part of a research project. For all concerts there is an effort to include learning from both aural and written sources within the classroom but students are encouraged to engage with other learning opportunities beyond the Institute. Students are also involved in the development of arrangements and the final selection of repertoire. Some students, who teach in the community and for local branches of CCÉ, have incorporated this repertoire into their own teaching.

While the *Ceol Oirghialla* ensemble contributes significantly to the cultural life of the region surrounding Dundalk through performances at home, the Department of Creative Arts, Media and Music also endeavours to provide international opportunities and experiences for students. International opportunities in recent years include Erasmus Intensive Programmes and Strategic Partnerships. The DkIT *Ceol Oirghialla* Traditional Music Ensemble has been invited to perform internationally including performances at the International Society for Music Education Conferences in Brazil (2014) and Scotland (2016), the Rauland Winter Music Festival (2017) and at events in North America (2014) and Scotland (2018). The principal aim of these tours was to provide participants with the opportunity to gain international experiences and extend their learning. Other objectives included the desire to enhance awareness of the study of Irish culture at Dundalk internationally and raise the profile of the Institute and the surrounding region. Repertoire for all international performances has focused on the musical heritage of the Oriel region, disseminating an awareness of the region and its musical traditions. Despite a regional focus, there is not an effort to fix a canon or develop pedagogical approaches that ignore a wider tradition or abandon established narratives altogether. As Talty notes, 'formalized and structured music curricula inevitably

prioritize certain components of a musical culture over others. The extent to which they accommodate diverse perspectives on a given music determines the extent to which music education eschews the construction of inflexible music canons' (2017: 103). It is important that while learning outcomes are identified, the content remains flexible and the creative outputs remain shaped by each new group of students that enter into the academic community.

Some of the research undertaken at DkIT has also included a focus on regional traditions. Many turn to the seminal study *A Hidden Ulster* (Ní Uallacháin, 2003) which primarily considers the song and poetry heritage of the Oriel region. The organisation Ceol Camloch produced a book, accompanying CDs and a DVD entitled *The Sweets of May* based primarily on research conducted by Mullaghbawn-based fiddle player and composer Josephine Keegan and assisted by Camlough uilleann piper Tommy Fegan, who also completed an MA on Irish traditional music at DkIT (2015). Dissertations by O'Connor (2008), McElwain (2014), Moley (2016) and Crawford (forthcoming) continue to engage with the musical traditions of Oriel and surrounding areas. O'Connor completed an MA at DkIT on the music of collector Luke Donnellan, while Monaghan musician Seán McElwain completed his PhD on the nearby region of Sliabh Beagh (2014),

which also had a significant focus on manuscript collections. Ciara Moley's MA dissertation focused on Irish traditional music festivals that leaned on and contributed to the construction of an Oriel musical identity while Sylvia Crawford is focusing on the harper Patrick Quin from South Armagh, who was present at the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792 but has not received the same level of attention as some of his contemporaries. Research by Ní Uallacháin, O'Connor and McElwain informs a number of their creative outputs and commercial musical releases including *A Hidden Ulster – The Gaelic Songs of Ulster Volume 1* (2007), *Ceoltaí Oiriala* (2017), *Journeyman* (2009) and *Our Dear Dark Mountain with the Sky Over It* (2014), while Crawford's research has informed musical recordings for Ní Uallacháin's website www.orielarts.com (2017). The album *A Louth Lilt* (2017), comprised of new compositions by performers and DkIT academics Adèle Commins and Daithí Kearney, was recorded at DkIT and reflects influences from both the local area and their travels internationally as musicians.

Community engagement is another important aspect of the Institute's strategy and faculty and students in music have been prominent. These activities can also impact on regional geographies of Irish traditional music. Some local performers have participated in performances at the Institute with the

students, including students of Mona Roddy and the Walsh School of Music. While the local community are the audience for concerts in DkIT, staff and students also participate in music activities outside of their academic studies, teaching, directing ensembles and organising events. A number of staff and students were also involved as performers and organisers in Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, which was held in the neighbouring town of Drogheda in 2018. This event will further add to the recognition for the musical heritage of the region. As Stokes argues: ‘The musical event [...] evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity’ (1994: 3). Other projects in the Department have engaged further with local groups, leading, in some instances, to performances of collaboratively written songs and these, along with activities in other institutions (see Dillane et al 2017), provide models for further developments.

All of this activity reflects a move towards ethnomusicology at home and, with it, brings a number of challenges. Writing in the second edition of the seminal ethnomusicological book on fieldwork *Shadows in the Field* (2008), Bruno Nettl contends:

We came to realize that we should do field research in our own communities, something that was both easier (it’s our turf) and harder (be “objective” about one’s own family and friends?) than working abroad. We began to question the role we were playing in the “field”

communities, whether we were doing harm or good, and about our relationship to ethnomusicologists from those host communities. We worried that our very presence would result in significant culture change (and sometimes it did) (2008: vi).

Similarly acknowledging the potential impact of academia on communities of practices, Scottish geographer and flute player Frances Morton thus argued:

There is currently concern within Geography, surrounding the intrusion of academic research performances on lay social practices and performances. There is a worry that the lay practices may change due to the influence of academic research. However, recognising that research is a performance in its own right, allows better critique of how we undertake our research, accumulate and understand our geographic knowledge, and relate to our research participants (2001: 67).

As is outlined in this paper, it is clear that there is a close connection between academic research and practice in Irish traditional music, with many academics identifying themselves and being identified as practitioners.

6. Conclusions

Performances and discourses of Irish traditional music often express or make reference to regional identities. A trend towards regionalisation and regionality in the tradition is influenced by local politics, commercial endeavour and academic study. In many instances there is an emphasis on story over musical style through the processes of naming tunes and presenting narratives that associate repertoire with people and places rather than

performing in a particular musical style or creating an identifiable regional sound. Audiences can relate to and interpret the musical performance based on their own prior experiences, knowledge of music and culture and ability to relate to extra-musical geographical narratives. The authenticity of performances may be judged differently by local and global audiences and understanding differences in the understanding and interpretation of authenticity in performance practice is central to identifying regional differences in aesthetics and musical identities.

Regionalisation can challenge the established canon and narratives of the tradition, drawing attention to neglected places and highlighting alternative soundscapes and approaches. The academic institution is a space in which regional identities are constructed, deconstructed and performed through research, learning and teaching. Through a variety of research practices including archival research, performance practice and applied ethnomusicology, Dundalk Institute of Technology plays a role in the (re)construction and dissemination of a local regional identity for the Oriel region. Reflecting and contributing to the activities of a wider community of musical practice in the region, faculty and students are active agents in the processes of musical

evolution and the expression of a regional identity locally and globally.

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